

# South Willamette Area Concept Plan

## REPORT: URBAN DESIGN WORKSHOP June 27, 2012, & ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

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### Event Information

Time: June 27, 2012; 6:00 – 8:00 PM  
Location: Hilyard Community Center, 2580 Willamette Street  
Facilitation: City of Eugene Planning Division  
Patricia Thomas, Robin Hostick, Carolyn Burke, Terri Harding, Nan Laurence, Jennifer Knapp, Amanda Asa, Sam Yerke, Anna Liu, and William Ellis  
Attendees: Approximately 54 community members

### Online Questionnaire

Duration: Results compiled for June 27- August 9  
Respondents: 89

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### OVERVIEW

The City of Eugene Planning Division hosted a public workshop to further explore ways to guide potential future development and redevelopment in the South Willamette district. The district is defined generally as the area between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenues from the base of College Hill to Amazon Park. Several previous workshops have been held to discuss the development of a concept plan for the district. The purpose of this workshop was to review the June 2012 Revised Draft Concept Plan and to study and discuss a range of urban design options for the height and shape of future buildings. In addition to being presented at the workshop, the presentation was available to the community online along with a questionnaire to provide feedback.

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### ADVERTISEMENT

The workshop and the associated online presentation and questionnaire were publicized through the following means:



#### Postcard

- 2683 postcards sent to residents, businesses and property owners in the district
- Email invitations sent to over 500 people on the project Interest list
- Announcements were sent through the following online newsletters:
  - Neighborly News to Neighborhood Leaders
  - Southeast Neighbors
  - Crest Drive Neighbors

- American Institute of Architects, Southwest Oregon Chapter
  - Friendly Area Neighborhood Board
  - Southtowne Business Association
- The workshop was announced in the City/Region section of the Register Guard preceding the event.
- The workshop was included in the City Manager's Office public meetings calendar
- The workshop invitation was included on the city's South Willamette Area Plan web page.
- All notices of the workshop alerted people who could not attend to see the presentation online, posted the day of the event, and to fill out a questionnaire to provide input.

## **PRESENTATION**

The presentation provided a brief history of the project, presented the Revised Concept Plan and included information about building form options for the district under the topic, "Building Form: The Shape of Things to Come."

The presentation outlined the reasons for creating a long-term vision for the district:

- to implement the Envision Eugene strategy of using existing land as efficiently as possible, in key commercial and transit oriented corridor areas;
- to create more "20 minute neighborhoods," places where people can meet most daily needs within walking distance;
- to launch projects that lead to on-the- ground change and improvements that the community wants to see.

Also described were the reasons a vision is being created specifically for the South Willamette district:

- it is a core commercial area along a key transit corridor; areas with these qualities were identified by the community as preferred locations for growth through Envision Eugene ,
- the district is already seeing some change with new businesses and housing types,
- it is closer to "market ready" for new development than some areas,
- has many positive qualities that can be enhanced by good planning before too much change occurs,
- the area is also subject to a transportation study of Willamette Street; this concept plan will set the stage for improvements.

The Revised Concept Plan which illustrates locations for businesses and new housing types that meet the needs of a changing population was described. The plan focuses on four primary uses as well as connections and open space:

- Willamette Street mixed use areas
- Higher-Density Apartments & Condos
- Apartments & Condos
- Single-family Options
- Primary Connections and Open Space

The presentation also outlined the sequence of planning steps:

1. Creating a vision for the area- Where we are now!
2. Future steps
  - Code changes to support the vision
  - Street and other improvements
  - Incentive programs

Urban design options were presented for the height and shape of future building form. The presentation described the option of creating a set of new urban design standards for buildings in the district that describe appropriate heights, setbacks, “step backs” at upper levels and transitions to adjacent uses. These topics were discussed by groups at tables and participants provided their input.

## TABLE EXERCISES

Participants gathered around five large tables with two facilitators each, a flip chart for notes and several illustrations supporting the discussion.

### Group Table Exercises & Discussion

Questions:

1. Does the draft concept plan show the right uses in the right places?  
For reference, “Places for Business and Living” “Connection & Open Space” maps (below) on each table.



Uses and locations to evaluate:

- Willamette Street Mixed Use areas
- Higher-Density Apartments & Condos
- Apartments & Condos
- Single-family Options: row houses, townhouses, courtyard houses, cluster cottages, secondary dwelling units
- Connections and Open Spaces

Participants discussed the merits and issues with the locations shown on the revised concept plan and provided feedback.

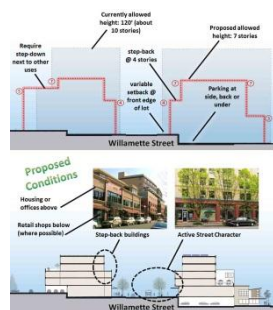
## 2. Do the sketches show the right building form?

- Height, setback, stepback
- Transitions



For specific uses and locations:

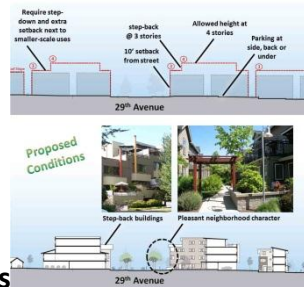
Mixed Use



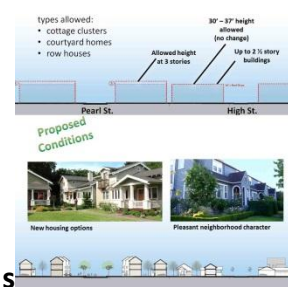
High Density Apts & Condos



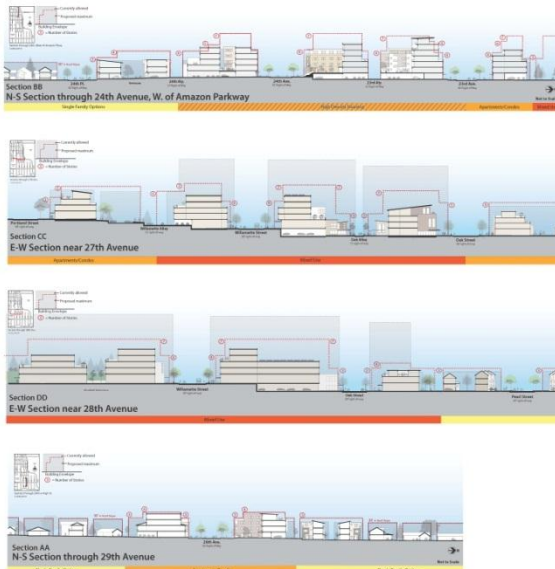
## Apts & Condos



## Single Family Option



## District Sections and Building Heights map



Large District Section illustrations and a cross-reference map (shown above) provided on each table showed the kinds of relationships between building forms that we want to hear feedback on. Participants were asked to provide general input on building form and it was clarified that specific dimensions and details will need additional consideration following this workshop to be develop into an integrated set of design guidelines. There will be a future opportunity to comment on more detailed guidelines!

## Questions explored about form:

Height: How many stories seem right?

Height of Step Back: Should the building be full height all the way out to the street or step back at a certain number of stories?

Setback: How close should the building be to the front property line? Should space be left for sidewalk activities? What part of the district is best for more sidewalk activities? What areas are best for buildings closer to the front lot line?

Transitions: Does the building need to step down to adjacent uses? In what locations? What height, set back?

## **WORKSHOP and QUESTIONNAIRE CONCLUSIONS**

Workshop participants and those who filled out the online questionnaire engaged in a detailed review of the urban design proposal. Participants expressed appreciation for being asked to provide input at this level of detail. **With a few exceptions as described below, two thirds to three quarters of respondents to the questionnaire and the comment sheets submitted at the workshop responded favorably to the concepts presented.**

Overall, there was broad support for the location of uses shown on the concept plan. The proposed uses reinforce existing patterns. Respondents offered a range of views about the height, setback, step back and transition proposals, and many felt the proposal addressed significant concerns. Special areas of concern as well as a rationale for potential revisions to the concept plan are outlined below.

### **Uses**

Specific “use” suggestions included extending **mixed uses** to more areas and extending office uses along Willamette south of 29<sup>th</sup>. More mixed use was also suggested at 32<sup>nd</sup> and Donald St. For the mixed use concept to succeed in creating a vibrant and compact urban district, the size of the mixed use area will need to be balanced with the distance people typically walk while browsing, doing errands, and enjoying cafes and entertainment. Spreading retail mixed use too thin over a large area has been observed to reduce the success of walkable districts. As comparisons, in our downtown and in the campus shops and restaurant district, the intensively active area occurs in a one or two block walking radius. The approach in the South Willamette district might include concentrating more intensive pedestrian improvements and pedestrian-oriented retail opportunities in one or more small areas, while allowing non-retail (office) mixed use in other suggested areas.

Concerns were expressed for adding apartments and condos in or near low density areas. Conversely, others raised concerns with placing apartments and condos on busy streets, where people might not want to live due to concerns about noise and health. Other comments included favorable responses to the **higher density housing** along 24<sup>th</sup> Ave, and proceeding with caution regarding higher intensity along 29<sup>th</sup> Ave.

Suggestions included more **apartments or row houses** along Amazon Parkway, near the transit station at 29<sup>th</sup> and Amazon, as well as south of 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 29<sup>th</sup> Place, in the vicinity of Oak Street. Participants pointed out that properties near the potential future route for bus rapid transit on Amazon Parkway will be very desirable for housing, and that keeping lower limits on building height and density in these areas will miss an important opportunity to meet community goals for redevelopment and equitable access to transit. Given the range of responses, including concern about changes to existing single-family neighborhoods (primarily from residents living there currently) the draft proposal appears to strike a reasonable balance. Opportunities for multifamily housing are provided on 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue and at the intersection of Amazon Parkway and 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue with height limits and transitions to improve compatibility. As mentioned, other ideas to improve design and character of new development and redevelopment will be discussed at the next workshop.

There was general interest and support for diverse single family housing types such as cottage clusters, courtyard housing and row houses, called “**single family options**”, in existing single family neighborhoods. A desire for a mix of residents, both student and others, was expressed, along with concern about effects of increased population and building scale in the area on light, gardens, traffic, parking, lot sizes, and views of the sky. Some suggested that concerns about the compatibility of row houses in single family areas may be addressed by encouraging row houses in certain locations as a transition between single family options and more intensive uses, rather than allowing row houses mixed with other single family houses. This option should be explored as a potential revision.

Including a plan for uses on the Willard School site was also recommended in the event it did not remain a school location

### **Building Height**

Though a many participants supported taller mixed use and apartment and condo buildings, individual comments trended toward reducing the height below seven stories to provide for daylight, spaciousness and views, particularly of Spencer Butte. Reduced height at 32<sup>nd</sup> and Donald was specifically suggested. About half of the respondents felt that the proposed heights of **mixed use, and higher density apartments and condos** were about right. The other half of respondents preferred lower buildings of roughly three to five stories. Since buildings over 5 stories require a different, and more costly, construction type, reducing building height below seven stories may reduce the chance of redevelopment by making certain kinds of projects financially infeasible. This will need to be balanced against the concerns of light, scale and views. One approach would be to reduce height in *most* areas and only preserve it in a *few key locations* such as larger commercial sites or key intersections. Approximately two-thirds of respondents were supportive of the proposed **apartment and condo** heights (generally three to five stories) while the remainder suggested either reducing or increasing height. A high majority of respondents were in favor of the height proposal for **single family options**.

### **Building Setbacks and Transitions and Design**

Participants generally supported the proposals for **building form transitions and setbacks**. The transitions were thought to be quite important to the success of the district and comments cautioned special care where adjacent uses are dissimilar.

Participants encouraged planning **building design and street design** together in order to achieve desired street character. Concern was also raised about the importance of maintaining economic vitality on Willamette Street. An important outcome of the concept plan work is to provide a context for the parallel Willamette Street Improvement Plan project. That project is focused on the street and making it easier and more comfortable for walkers, bikers, motorists and transit to move through the district. The concept plan will advance preferred guidelines for street-side character that will inform the street improvement project as well as other, future public improvements. Responses to the question about the right setback for mixed use were split with half supporting the proposal and half concerned that the setback from the street should be greater to allow for amenities, especially adjacent to taller buildings. Wider setbacks were identified as valuable to allow for some or all of the following: wide, inviting sidewalks, outdoor café seating, bike lanes, street parking, street trees, and transit options and stations. The next public event will focus in part on draft proposals for street-side character to help ensure a safe and inviting pedestrian realm that is critical to commercial success.

### **COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS**

**The above provides an overview and conclusions regarding the community input about the Revised Concept Plan during summer 2012. Please see “Reports” and “Detailed Comments” for additional community input.**